

**In the Claims:**

**Please enter the following amended claims 16 and 34:**

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16. (Thrice Amended) An interconnect comprising:

- HI
- (a) one or more metal lines formed from a first metal layer, said metal lines having gaps therebetween;
  - (b) low-k material filling all of the gaps between the metal lines and having a height and one or more vertical portions;
  - (c) a protective layer formed directly over and in direct contact with the metal lines and the low-k material, wherein the protective layer covers at least one vertical portion of the low-k material;
  - (d) a dielectric layer formed over the protective layer, wherein the dielectric layer has a different composition than the low-k material and the protective layer;
  - (e) one or more vias etched in the dielectric layer;
  - (f) a metal for filling the vias;
  - (g) a second metal layer formed over the dielectric layer; and
  - (h) one or more openings in the protective layer for allowing the metal vias to contact the first metal lines.

34. (Twice Amended) An interconnect comprising:

- H1
- (a) a plurality of metal lines formed from a first metal layer, said metal lines having gaps therebetween;
  - (b) material filling all of the gaps between the metal lines and having a height and one or more vertical portions;
  - (c) a protective layer formed directly over and in direct contact with the metal lines and the material, wherein the protective layer covers at least one vertical portion of the material;
  - (d) a dielectric layer formed over the protective layer, wherein the dielectric layer has a different composition than the protective layer;
  - (e) one or more vias etched in the dielectric layer;
  - (f) a metal within the vias;
  - (g) a second metal layer formed over and in direct contact with the dielectric layer;
- and
- (h) one or more openings in the protective layer for allowing the metal in the vias to contact the metal lines.
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**Please enter the following new claims 35 and 36:**

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--35. An interconnect comprising:

- H2
- (a) one or more metal lines formed from a first metal layer, said metal lines having gaps therebetween;

(b) low-k material filling the gaps between the metal lines and having a height and one or more vertical portions;

(c) a protective layer formed directly over the metal lines and the low-k material, wherein the protective layer covers at least one vertical portion of the low-k material, and wherein the protective layer includes an oxide; *obviously*

*H2* (d) a dielectric layer formed over the protective layer, wherein the dielectric layer has a different composition than the low-k material and the protective layer;

(e) one or more vias etched in the dielectric layer;

(f) a metal for filling the vias;

(g) a second metal layer formed over the dielectric layer; and

(h) one or more openings in the protective layer for allowing the metal vias to contact the first metal lines.--

--36. The interconnect of claim 35, wherein the oxide includes silicon dioxide.--